

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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REPS. MARKEY, NEAL AND MASS DELEGATION WRITE PRESCRIPTION FOR WHAT AILS SENIORS

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-Malden) today introduced a bill together with Rep. Richard E. Neal (D-Springfield) and every member of the Massachusetts congressional delegation in the U.S. House, to eliminate the preemption of state prescription drug benefit laws in connection with Medicare + Choice plans. Also, Senator Kennedy is introducing companion legislation in the Senate today.

Rep. Markey said, "I am committed, as every member of the Massachusetts delegation is committed, to restoring this vital benefit for the seniors who lost it on January 1, 1999. We want to avoid a situation in which seniors are forced to decide between buying prescription drugs and buying food or home heating fuel, or any other of life's necessities. By introducing the bill early, we are making it clear that this is an important priority, and we will be in the best position to build a winning coalition with our colleagues from throughout the country.

"President Clinton has indicated that extending Medicare benefits to include prescription drug coverage will be an important goal of his during his remaining years in office and that Congress will have to work in a bipartisan way to realize that goal. We want to ensure that the problems facing seniors in Massachusetts will be at the forefront of this debate."

Rep. Markey submitted the following statement when he introduced the bill today:

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill to eliminate the preemption of state prescription drug benefit laws in connection with Medicare + Choice plans. I am pleased to be joined in this endeavor by every member of the Massachusetts congressional delegation.

Mr. Speaker, on January 1, 1999 many seniors in Massachusetts lost the unlimited prescription drug benefit available from their Medicare HMO due to a provision in federal law that was interpreted by a court to override Massachusetts state law. Massachusetts is the only state which had a law of this kind – one which required Medicare + Choice plans doing business in the state to provide an unlimited prescription drug benefit to seniors. Despite the efforts of the entire Massachusetts congressional delegation, the Administration, and the Governor of Massachusetts to find a legislative or administrative fix at the end of last year, which included making it possible for the HMOs to do the right thing and extend the benefit, the HMOs refused to provide the unlimited benefit. This vital benefit must be restored, and the legislation I am filing today will restore the coverage this year.

Mr. Speaker, my Massachusetts colleagues and I believe that Congress did not intend to preempt the Massachusetts prescription drug benefit law and force seniors in Massachusetts to choose between prescription drugs and food or other necessities when it passed the

Balanced Budget Act of 1997. Congress can clarify its intent by passing the bill we are introducing today, and correct the gross injustice perpetrated upon Massachusetts seniors enrolled in these plans.

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